THE

EVIDENCE;

OR,

Religious and Moral Gazette.

RELIGION AND MORALITY ARE THE BASIS OF HUMAN FELICITY.

VOL. I.] SEPTEMBER 12, 1807. [No 34

From the PANOPLIST.

On the Execution of Laws.

AMONG the many rules proposed for deriving the greatest benefit from laws, this is one of the most important; *that they be promptly and speedily enforced.* Tho' they combine in them the two essential qualities of strength and impartiality; though they are plainly and invariably directed to the public good; though they are enacted with consummate wisdom, and sanctioned by the authority of a thousand Solons; yet if the execution of them is attended with delay and indecision, they will necessarily be inefficacious.

PRESENT punishment is a much more powerful preventive of crimes, than future punishment. When present evil engages our attention, and threatens our happines, it appears highly alarming, and how to avoid it is the object of our immediate and anxious enquiry; but, if removed to a moderate distance, it loses its formidable aspect, and dwindles into comparative insignificance. This wild judgment with respect to present and future objects encourages all the vices that deform the human character. It is this which makes the sluggard prefer poverty and contempt, to wealth and respectability; which persuades the drunkard to indulge in excess with the certainty of losing health and reputation, and of becoming the object of universal disgust and abhorrence; which induces the voluptuary to plunge others with himself into the depths of infamy and sin; and which leads millions of moral beings to postpone the concerns of eternity for the enjoyments of the hour. What we apprehend to be near, is magnified by all the powers of the imagnation; while we force ourselves to believe remote objects envelóped in clouds of uncertainty. But as a portrait is useles, when the living person is present to our view; so I need not attempt to describe that which is felt by every mind, and which it requires all the power of religion to overcome. Of this propensity the magistrate may the more profitably take advantage, as it is peculiarly strong in those who most frequently expose themselves to the penalty of law; men unaccustomed to reflect, and prone to seize on temptation, equally regardless of the crime, and its distant consequences. A light punishment, therefore, which follows an offence without delay, strikes greater terror, than one immensely more severe, if it is to be inflicted at some future period. Thus by a prompt adminstration of justice, the good of the community is promoted with the good of the offender; a happy

concurrence, which the wise and benevolent legislature will always strive to obtain.

When punishment accompanies transgression, and the connexion between them appears inseparable, the penalty is considered as more just, both by the sufferer, and the public. If the people once form an opinion that the laws are too rigorous, all the good to be expected from them is entirely prevented. Pity is necessarily excited for the transgressor; and where this passion prevails, justice will not long maintain its authority. The offender, who has been soothed by the voice of compassion, feels half recompensed for his sufferings, and quite justified in the conduct, which brought them upon him. But if he is led from the very act to the place of punishment, all will see the wisdom of the law, which condemns him, and popular compassion will not operate to disarm justice of its terrors. For a short time after an offence is committed, all transgressors, but the most abandoned, feel a compunction for their violation of the laws. This time should be seized as the moment for the infliction of punishment to the best advantage. But if the decisions of conscience are suffered to be neglected and forgotten before those of law are denounced, punishment will answer no purpose to the sufferer, but to make him the more incorrigible.

Another fundamental requisite to the happy regulation of a community, is, that the execution of the laws be rigorously exact. It would be hardly necessary to touch upon this part of the subject, were it not an opinion embraced by vast numbers of our countrymen, that, provided the quiet of individuals, and of the public, is not directly and wantonly disturbed, it is a matter of no serious concern what else is done; that all offences, which do not immediately accomplish this end, are mere venial trifles; and that it is the part of a prudent, and especially of a good-natured magistrate to pass over them in silence. No doctrine can be better fitted to train up villains systematically from the cradle, than this. The truth is, no regulation established by proper authority, however insignificant it may appear, should be violated, no ordinance despised, no injunction disregarded with impunity.

If transgressors are punished in the beginning of their wickedness, we may hope for reformation. There is a progress in villainy. No man ever committed murder, or treason, or burglary, as his first offence; and few men ever would commit these enormous crimes, if their first offences were properly reprehended. There is a regular and almost imperceptible gradation in iniquity, from the mischief practiced by the truant school boy, to the hardy adventurers to the high-handed assassin. It is not a dictate of common sense, or sound experience, to use correction after the offender has become incorrigible. *Obsta principiis*, is a maxim, which ought to be deeply engraven on the heart of every moral agent. At what time does the physician choose to heal a disorder? As soon as it is perceived? or after the functions of life are nearly suspended? At what time is the obstinacy of children most easily subdued? When the seeds of disobedience begin to sprout? when they are first caught in the neglect of their duty? or after they are rooted in vice, and their tempers have become ungovernable? The offender will find great reason to rejoice that he was punished in the first instance of transgres-

sion; and that, by a temporary inconvenience or mortification, he is probably withholden from doing what would have occasioned him years of remorse, and stigmatized him with indelible infamy.

It is an invaluable blessing to have the dividing line between what is blameworthy and what is laudable, plainly and exactly drawn. It is an unspeakable privilege to have those, to whose care the execution of the laws is entrusted, zealous to fix the precise meaning of every statute. But where some of the laws are enforced, and some neglected; where some are dead, some expiring, and many in a declining state, the man is beside himself, who expects a cheerful obedience to the rest. He, who has frequently violated any law with impunity, soon justifies himself in the violation of every other, and at length becomes so hardened as to trample on every ordinance, both human and divine.

But the whole system of jurisprudence should be shielded from contempt; and were all other considerations laid aside, this is abundantly sufficient to compel the greatest exactness. A contempt of the laws is a formidable enemy to government itself; an enemy, which is the more dangerous, as it cannot be met; which declines all fair and honorable war, and vanquishes by the magic of popular prejudices. A little relaxation in the distribution of justice makes way for more; a few despised regulations prepare the mind to despise the rest, till the whole code becomes the object of neglect and ridicule. A statute book of contemned laws is fit only for inscriptions on the tomb of departed government. It is a volume of satires more poignant than those of Juvenal or Persus; satires on the legislators, the magistrates, and the people; satires, which not only cause a momentary vexation, but inflict upon the general happiness a severe and lasting wound.

Again, it is necessary to the harmony of society, that the execution of the laws be uniform and impartial. If the administration of justice is unsteady; if it vibrates from energy and rigour, to laxness and indolence, and is at one time scrupulously exact, and at another foolishly negligent; nothing permanent and salutary can be expected. And if a dignified impartiality does not characterize the judical proceedings, it is most plain that there can be no confidence in the rulers, and that government will become the object of distrust and aversion.

Yet it is a notorious and glaring fact, that in no country under heaven, are the rich punished for what are denominated the smaller kinds of offences. From their elevated situation in life, their example is dreadfully contagious. But if those, who think that the possession of property licences and sanctions their crimes, were properly humbled at the footstool of justice, their example would no longer contaminate society. And if the lower classes of the people saw that no man was superior to the laws, they would acquiesce with much greater alacrity in proper restraints, and all ranks would much more heartily engage in sacrificing individual gratification to the public welfare.

Whoever is in the least acquainted with the state of morals in our country, cannot but confess that much depends upon the execution of the laws. Who does not know that national calamities are the legit-

imate offsprings of national vice and abandonment? And who will not acknowledge that our nation ought to be purified from sin, that the judgments, which hang over us, and which we so justly deserve, may be averted? Look around for yourselves, and consider this matter. Take a view of the fashionable vices only which now prevail; of those practiced by the great, the splendid, the honorable, in situations where temptation ought to meet with a firm and an indignant repulse; and then judge what are the crimes perpetrated by those who are debased by the example of superiors; who are unenlightened by education, uninfluenced by a fear of disgrace, and destitute of every restraining principle,

CONTEMPLATE the extensive prevalence of profaneness. See the earnest endeavors of wicked men to dishonor the name of God, to invent blasphemies hitherto untho't of; and to gain themselves laurels in the war against Heaven. Hear curses uttered by children unconscious of their meaning; and see the hoary driveller, with one foot in his grave, muttering execrations against his Maker and Preserver. View the drunkard, forfeiting all claim to human society, destroying his intellectual powers, and committing a sure though lingering suicide; a suicide, destroying at the same time his body and his soul. Listen to the midnight orgies of the gaming table, where robbery is legalized by the tribunal of honor, where cheating is elevated into a liberal profession, and where the great strife is, who shall decoy most adventures, and sacrafice them to the rapaciousness of the banditti. See the Sabbath, which ought to be a day of rest, of worship, and of instruction in holy things, converted into a day of sloth, a day of visiting, a day of unhallowed amusement, a day of feasting and riot, and, preeminently, a day of sin. See men among our senators, judges and governors, foolish and mad enough to go openly and shamelessly to murdering each other in a duel; and all this under laws, which profess to guard life as a thing sacred, and under a religion, which proclaims "peace on earth," and declares, that "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." See adultery proved in our courts, time after time, for the purpose of obtaining a divorce, and the adulterers suffered to go at large, detested indeed by good men, but unpunished for their crimes, and totally unnoticed by the magistrate. See the seducer practicing every fiend-like artifice; committing deliberate, reiterated perjury; destroying the hopes and happiness of brothers, sisters, and parents; and enhancing his guilt by offering up others with himself at the shrine of pollution. In a part of the world where the gospel has been preached from generation to generation; among a people more favored by Heaven than any other from the fall of man to the present time, brothels are instituted, supported, defended. Rise up, O Babylon, thou mother of harlots, and blush for our enormities. Thy crimson abominations whiten into innocence, when compared with more aggravated offences of a Christian land.

IN this state of things, when every honest man wishes that the laws should have all possible efficacy, much dependence must be placed on our rulers. Imagine to yourselves all our countrymen, who hold offices in the magistracy, assembled, from the president of the United States, to a justice of the peace, or a grand juror, and addressed on this important subject by some venera-

ble civilian, like a Hale, or a Mansfield, skilled equally in law and in human nature.

"My friends, and countrymen," would he not say? "use great diligence, that in all your behaviour, your example be such as may be considered a safe pattern for imitation. Transgression of the law in a magistrate, is like open wickedness in a minister of the gospel; it prevents all the good he might otherwise have done, and produces evil which no repentance, no exertions, can repair.

"When obliged to inflict punishment, let it be seen that justice occupies the first place in your breast, and a dignified clemency the second; act the part of a friend, and a father, not of an illiberal, unfeeling tyrant.

"Neither covet nor avoid popularity. Be apt to distrust your own talents in governing, when brought into competition with those of your neighbors. If they are better qualified to hold the place of trust, be willing that they should be preferred. Always remember that the man who is elevated by the intrigues of a faction, is never respected by his friends, nor his enemies; and what is worse, he seldom does his duty as a wise and faithful magistrate.

"Never fall into the foolish error of considering less important offices as dishonorable. View the man, who does this, as possessed of a weak mind, and as worthy of no office, of no confidence. Rectitude of conduct, and a just sense of dignity, will render any office honorable.

"Remember your respective oaths of office. Meditate upon them by night and by day. Consider the engagement into which you have entered, as it really is; an engagement which Jehovah, the Lord God of Hosts, is called to witness. Resolve to act agreeably to this momentous obligation. If this be not your intention, stand off "*Procul, O procul, este profani.*". Touch not the holy thing with polluted hands. You had better withdraw like cowards from the performance of your duty, than imprecate upon yourselves that divine vengeance, which you are predetermined to deserve.

"Consider yourselves as always responsible to your country. Tho' she may not be able to detect and punish, you are still responsible. You are entrusted with a charge of more value than any worldly possession; a charge of incalculable importance to the present generation, and to posterity: you are to purify the public morals; you are to guard our youth against the numerous temptations, which lie in wait to devour them. Like the great Roman magistrate, consider your country as addressiug you in the most solemn and impressive manner. Let each one of you hear the "*quid agis, Marce Tulli,*" as applied to himself, and let him ponder well how he shall return a satisfactory answer to this most sacred demand of his country.

"Above all, consider yourselves as responsible to God. He instituted civil government; he has given rules for the regulation of your conduct; he has appointed you his vicegerents on earth; and as your conduct shall prove, so will be your allotments in the day of retribution. If you connive at iniquity; if you violate your oaths; if you barter your salvation for a "mess of pottage," for a miserable gust of pre-

sent popularity; if you enlist under the arch revolter, and assist in withdrawing men from allegiance to God, destruction is even now uncovered to receive you. But if you strive to co-operate with the divine will; if you conscientiously endeavor to prevent crimes with all your might, you will obtain the applause of good men in this world, and, in the world to come, the approbation of God.

C. Y. A.

AN EXTRACT.

"His blood shall be on us and on our children,"

Was the imprecation of those barbarous Jews, who with importunity demanded the death of Jesus Christ, and glutted themselves with his sufferings. But it was, in a far different sense, the interior voice of those believing souls, who entered into the design of God, who, by faith, are sprinkled with this blood which was to form the bond of union between heaven and earth.

"His blood be on us and on our children."

This is the voice which now sounds in our ears, and must be accomplished on us in one sense or another. Yes, this blood shall be on you either in vengeance and mediction, as it was upon ungrateful Jerusalem, in your families to trouble their peace, in your plans to defeat them, in your consciences to harrow them up, in your death-bed to darken it with horror and despair, and through all the periods of eternity, demanding the expiation of the crime, of tramping under foot the blood of the Son of God, and of having crucified afresh the Lord of Glory. Or it will be upon you, yes, this blood will be upon you, to strengthen all your infirmities, to preserve you in the hour of temptation, to console you under the pressure of calamity, to speak peace to the troubled conscience, to support you in dying agony, to render your death blessed and eternity triumphant.

Examples of the Efficacy of Prayer.

J. W. a pious young man, was employed in a large manufactory, the foreman of which took every opportunity to make him the butt of ridicule to his companions, on account of his religion, and because he refused to join in their drinking parties, and Sunday frolics. As they lived in the same house, the foreman one day heard him at prayer and resolved to listen; when, to his great surprise, he found himself the subject of the young man's supplications, who was spreading his case of infidelity and hardness of heart before God, and supplicating earnestly for him, that God would give him repentance unto salvation, and create in him a new heart, and put a right spirit within him. The foreman was deeply penetrated with what he heard. He had never entertained an idea of the power or nature of true prayer; he wondered at the eloquence and fervor with which his own unhappy case had been pleaded before God. I never, said he to himself, thus prayed to God for myself. The impression dwelt upon his mind. The next day he took John aside; "I wish, said he "John you would preach to me a little." John, who only tho't his grave face was meant to turn the subject into ridicule, said, Mr. M. you know I am no preacher; I don't pretend to it." "Nay," said

Mr. M. "I don't know how you can preach to-day; but I heard you yesterday make such a description of my state, as convinces me you can do it very well; and I shall be much obliged to you to repeat it"—"Oh," says John, "It is true I was at prayer, and did, indeed, heartily pray for you." "Very well, said the foreman, "pray do it again; for I never heard any thing in my life which so deeply affected me." John did not wait for much intreaty: They kneeled down together and cried to the God of grace, and found acceptance. From that day they were bosom friends, went to the same place of worship, and frequently bowed their knees together with praise and thanksgivings.

Their conversation adorned their profession; and the mocker became a confessor of the grace which he had so often abused and turned into ridicule.

Letter from a Brother to a Sister.

My Dear M——,

I Have heretofore written to you on the importance of temporal concerns, I am now about to write to you on a subject, compared with which, those I have mentioned are trifles, and without importance. The subject is one of which has not been thought beneath the notice of men, of angels and of God. This subject is the destruction of trifling and sinful propensities in the hearts of men; the restoration of a holy principle to the soul, and the translation of the sinner from a state of sin and spiritual death, to a state of holiness, righteousness and spiritual life, through the merits and intercession of a crucified Saviour. All mankind, my dear M——, by practically consenting to the disobedience of our first parents, and by innumerable actual transgressions have brought upon themselves the righteous penalty of God's holy law; and in consequence of that, without an interest in Christ, must forever perish. He by his suffering on the earth laid a foundation for all sinners to be saved who will come unto him by repentance of sins, and by an acceptance of him, as abundantly willing and sufficient to save them, and after all their prayers, tears and sorrows by giving all the glory, if they are saved, to him who died for them.

You well know, dear M. that you are a sinner of the description that I have mentioned, and that God alone is able to save, and that he will not save you, unless you repent and are heartily sorry for your sins. You likewise know that youth is infinitely the best time to prepare for eternity. Do not imagine (as many have done, and by that means, have no doubt gone down to the regions of sorrow and despair) that by embracing religion, you at once shut yourself out from all the pleasures and enjoyments naturally and exclusively attached to youth; for let me tell you, my dear, nothing was ever so false and erroneous. I ask, who are the best judges of their happiness? Are not they who have been in both situations? If so let me tell you I have heard religious youth say, of themselves, I can say, since I have maintained a hope of myself, I have enjoyed more happiness from religion than I ever did from any worldly thing, and not only so, every innocent amusement (and others you would not wish to enjoy) has been sweetened by religion.

The pleasure of such amuse-

ments is by no means lessened, and the happiness which is derived from the contemplation of God and a happy future state is great and lasting. But the pleasure to be received from the company and conversation of religious friends, on religious subjects is beyond all comparison superior to that which any one can receive from the company of one of a different character. But what avails all this, when compared with the great object in view?

This life is of short duration; every hour and every day you live, you are one hour or one day nearer death and so much nearer the final judgment. A vast proportion of those that are ever saved, are converted when young; and of those who pass the time of youth without religion, there is great danger that in the future world most of them will lift up their eyes being in torment. If you pass over this warning in the providence of God, there is great danger that you will finally be lost forever. You have had a wonderful and surprising deliverance from your sickness. Let me ask you (and I beseech you through the mercy of God to ask yourself the question with solemnity) where would you have been now, had God in that sickness taken you out of the world? Was you prepared to die? Let me tell you that nothing but a change of heart will be sufficient. While over your sick bed I often thought that you were soon to sink into the eternal world. Oh, I tremble to think what a sentence you would have received from your judge. You have now learned that a sick bed is a bad time to prepare for death. Although I loved you as much as a brother could love a sister, and sorrowed to part with you as much, yet apprehensions about your future condition were the greatest of my concern; though I loved your body, I loved your soul more; though I sorrowed to part with you here, yet I sorrowed more to part with you for eternity. Believing, as I cannot but believe, that you was unprepared to die, I praise my God that he did not take you hence. This ought to be a subject of endless praise to God with you. Begin now, if you have not already began, to make religion the business of your life. Now pray to God, and praise him. If you wish to enquire what shall I do to be saved, apply to the scriptures. Your parents will direct you. I beseech you that when I return I may not only have in you a sister, but a religious friend. From your sincere Brother.

W.

SCRAP.

"*Let no man preach either Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or, what is more frequently the case,* himself, *but the Son of God, whose authority is supreme, whose doctrines* [*are*] *pure and perfect, whose life presents a spotless example of heaven-born morality.*

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